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Protection of children affected by armed conflict

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly, in accordance with section VIII of Assembly resolution 54/149 of 17 December 1999, the report prepared by Olara A. Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.*

* The report covers activities undertaken by the Special Representative from the beginning of October 1999 to the end of September 2000. It also assesses overall progress achieved during the course of the initial three-year mandate and identifies key activities for the years ahead. The scope of activities covered in this report caused its submission to be delayed.

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Protection of children affected by armed conflict

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, in which the Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to submit an annual report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. The report, the third since the mandate was established, covers activities undertaken by the Special Representative from the beginning of October 1999 to the end of September 2000.

2. In 1999 the General Assembly extended the mandate of the Special Representative for another three years beginning in September 2000. The report, therefore, assesses overall progress achieved during the course of the initial three-year mandate and sketches an agenda for action for the years ahead.

3. This report should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, which was submitted to the Security Council and the General Assembly on 19 July 2000 (A/55/163-S/2000/712). The Special Representative served as focal point for the preparation of that report, which provides an overview of the efforts and challenges to protect children during and after conflicts, and presents a number of concrete recommendations. Apart from those addressed specifically to the Security Council, those recommendations are for consideration and action by the General Assembly.

4. Since his appointment by the Secretary-General in September 1997 as Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara A. Otunnu has sought to ensure that the protection and rights of war-affected children are comprehensively addressed by key actors at international, regional and national levels. His role as public advocate and moral voice on behalf of the millions of children affected by conflict has centred on:

- Building greater awareness and mobilizing action;
- Proposing initiatives and engaging key actors to protect war-affected children;
- Promoting the application of international norms and traditional value systems that provide for the protection of children in times of conflict;
- Proposing concrete initiatives to protect children in the midst of war and engaging parties to conflict to undertake specific commitments in that context;
- Making the protection of children a priority concern in peace processes and peace operations and in all efforts to consolidate peace, heal and rebuild in the aftermath of conflict.

5. The Special Representative wishes to pay special tribute to Graça Machel, whose ground-breaking report in 1996 on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1) provided the first comprehensive assessment of the multiple ways in which children suffer in times of armed conflict. Her work laid the foundation for the present mandate and the growing efforts to protect children from war.

6. The activities of the Office of the Special Representative are funded entirely through voluntary contributions. The Special Representative extends his deep appreciation to the following Governments for their generous contributions to the trust fund: Andorra, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

II. Impact of armed conflict on children

7. Today, in as many as 50 countries around the world, children are suffering in the midst of armed conflict and its aftermath. In the decade from 1986 to 1996, armed conflicts killed more than 2 million children, injured or disabled more than 6 million children, and left more than 1 million children orphaned. At the present moment, there are over 22 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Increasingly children are specifically targeted, recruited as combatants or abducted to serve as sexual slaves. The number of child combatants under the age of 18 is estimated at 300,000. Each month, some 800 children are killed or maimed by landmines. These harrowing statistics cannot describe the damage done to individual children who have endured the horror of war.

8. Today's civil wars, fought over power and resources, are exploiting, maiming and killing more

children than ever. Traditional authority figures and value systems, which have buffered children and women from harm in the past, are no longer respected. During fighting, little distinction is made between civilians and combatants. The vast majority of victims, up to 90 per cent, are civilians, mostly children and women. This is soldier-on-civilian violence on an unprecedented scale.

9. Uprooted from their homes and communities, children are left without adequate food, shelter, education and health care. Crops, schools, health clinics and sanitation systems are degraded or destroyed, fuelling high levels of malnutrition and disease. Displaced adolescents are at increased risk of sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health problems, violence and substance abuse, and are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into armed forces or groups. During and after war, thousands of children, especially girls, are made targets of sexual abuse and rape, which takes a tremendous physical and emotional toll. Many children and their loved ones will fall victim to HIV/AIDS, which spreads especially rapidly in the corridors of conflict.

10. Although they are the least responsible for conflict, children suffer disproportionately from its impact. Children who have experienced violence and killing, displacement, sexual abuse and violence, or loss of loved ones carry deep scars of fear and hatred, and need supportive caregivers and secure communities to heal.

11. There is an impressive array of international human rights and humanitarian instruments to protect children from the consequences of war — most notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions — but parties to armed conflict continue to flout these norms. International standards are violated with impunity. The Special Representative strongly believes that the international community must now redirect its energies from the juridical task of developing standards to the political project of ensuring their application and respect on the ground. We must launch "an era of application" — the application of international and local norms for the protection of children in times of armed conflict.

III. Activities and initiatives undertaken in the past year

12. In the period from October 1999 to September 2000, the Special Representative has been pursuing the following initiatives and activities:

A. International standards

1. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

13. A most important victory for children achieved during the reporting period is the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, under which the age limit for participation in hostilities is raised from 15 to 18. The Special Representative, together with Member States, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations — particularly the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers — lobbied hard for this important new instrument, which follows six years of difficult negotiations by the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights. The Protocol was adopted by the General Assembly on 25 May 2000 (resolution 54/263), and on 5 June it was opened for signature and ratification by all States that have signed or ratified the Convention.

14. The Optional Protocol sets the age limit for direct participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment at 18 and prohibits insurgent armed groups "under any circumstances" from recruiting persons under 18 years or using them in hostilities. The agreement falls short of the "straight 18" position that the Special Representative has advocated with respect to enlistment into national armed forces. Nevertheless, the raising of the minimum age of voluntary enlistment to at least 16 and the inclusion of specific safeguards, including the provision of reliable proof of age and the informed consent of both volunteer and parents, represents an improvement on existing standards.

15. The Special Representative calls on all States to expedite their signing and ratification of the Optional Protocol, which will come into force three months after the deposit of the tenth ratification or accession. At the urging of the Special Representative and UNICEF, the Optional Protocol was included in the list of "core treaties" to which the Secretary-General urged States to

adhere during the Millennium Assembly. To date, 70 States have signed the Optional Protocol and three have ratified it (Bangladesh, Canada and Sri Lanka). The Special Representative urges States, when ratifying the Optional Protocol, to deposit binding declarations pursuant to the terms of article 3, establishing age 18 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into their national armed forces.

2. International Criminal Court

16. The Special Representative played the role of both catalyst and participant in efforts to ensure that the International Criminal Court protects the rights of children. At the suggestion of the Special Representative, a steering committee was formed to inform participants in the Preparatory Commission for the Court about children's issues. The Steering Committee on Children and Justice, comprising mostly non-governmental organizations, worked with the International Institute of Higher Studies in Criminal Sciences and the Government of Italy on an expert seminar in Siracusa, Italy, in February 2000 on the protection of children as victims and witnesses in the proceedings of the Court. The recommendations of the seminar were submitted by the Government of Italy as formal proposals during the session of the Preparatory Commission held in March 2000, resulting in significant additions to the text of the Rules of Evidence and Procedure of the Court.

17. As a result of these initiatives, the Rules of Evidence and Procedure now include several important provisions designed to protect children. The Rules provide for the appointment of a child-support person by the Victims and Witnesses Unit to facilitate the participation and protection of children as witnesses and to assist them through all stages of the proceedings. The Rules also enable the Prosecutor to record the questioning of a child, especially in cases of sexual or gender violence, so as to reduce any subsequent traumatization. To address foreseeable difficulties in notifying children of their right to participate, the Rules allow an application for participation to be made by a person acting on the child's behalf.

3. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

18. Following extensive lobbying by the Special Representative and non-governmental organizations with African Governments, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child — the first regional treaty establishing age 18 as a minimum age for all recruitment and participation in hostilities — entered into force in November 1999, following 15 ratifications. The Special Representative urges the remaining African States to ratify this important instrument.

B. Security Council

19. During the reporting period, the Special Representative worked to ensure that the protection of children in situations of armed conflict remained a major concern of the Security Council, building particularly on Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), which is the first resolution devoted to children and armed conflict. Resolution 1261 (1999) affirmed the issue as a peace and security concern, establishing an enabling political framework that sets out broad principles and provisions for the protection of war-affected children.

20. Since October 1999, some 37 debates, 7 resolutions, and 6 presidential statements have contained references and provisions on the protection of war-affected children. In the second half of 1999 the Security Council adopted resolutions incorporating child protection into the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and approved the deployment of senior child protection advisers with both operations.

21. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), the Special Representative has sought to ensure that the Secretary-General's regular reports to the Council on conflict situations pay special attention to the protection and rights of war-affected children. During the reporting period, child protection sections and references were regularly included in the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council on the situations in Angola, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo and East Timor, and thematic reports on the protection of civilians, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and sanctions. The Office of the Special Representative has participated in task forces and working groups on country situations and various themes to systematically ensure appropriate inputs into the reports.

22. A significant development during the reporting period was the adoption of resolution 1314 (2000) by the Security Council on 11 August following its third open debate on children and armed conflict, held on 26 July. Resolution 1314 (2000), the second Security Council resolution devoted specifically to children and armed conflict, was informed by the report of the Secretary-General. The report itself, which was called for in Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), is the first ever to be submitted to the Council on the issue. The Special Representative also arranged for Council members to have an exchange of views with a group of non-governmental organizations prior to the debate in an informal "Arria formula" briefing.

23. Security Council resolution 1314 (2000) builds on resolution 1261 (1999), by putting in place more targeted, action-oriented building blocks to protect children during and after conflict. In it, the Council stipulates several important measures. It stresses the need for Member States to exclude grave crimes against children from amnesty provisions and legislation; it calls for measures against the illicit trade in natural resources, small arms and light weapons that fuel war and contribute to the victimization of children. It calls for the protection of particularly vulnerable children, including internally displaced children, girls and abducted children. Particular attention is paid to regional organizations, which are encouraged to establish child protection units, include child protection staff in their field operations, curb cross-border activities deleterious to children such as child recruitment and illicit trade. The Council also calls for the strengthening of local capacities to protect children, and greater participation of young persons in peace-building programmes.

Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council

24. As the focal point for the preparation of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (A/55/163-S/2000/712), the Special Representative initiated a highly consultative process to ensure a comprehensive document. He actively sought inputs from all relevant key actors, including all peacekeeping operations, United Nations country teams, United Nations agencies and Secretariat departments, all Member States, non-governmental organizations, and individual experts. In addition, he held special consultations with UNICEF. The report, which contains a number of targeted and concrete recommendations, was submitted to the General Assembly and the Security Council highlighting the fact that the issue of children and armed conflict belongs on the agendas of both organs.

C. Regional organizations

25. The Special Representative has made it a priority to engage and encourage regional organizations to make the protection of children affected by armed conflict a vital aspect of their own agendas, and is very encouraged by the steps they have taken thus far.

1. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

26. At the Review Conference of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) held at Istanbul in November 1999, the Special Representative proposed a 10-point agenda for dialogue, building on earlier efforts by non-governmental organizations. Subsequently, participating States committed themselves in the Declaration adopted at the Istanbul Summit and in the Charter for European Security to develop and implement measures to actively promote children's rights and interests, with particular attention to the physical and psychological well-being of children in conflict and post-conflict situations.

27. They also decided to devote the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar for 2000 to the theme of children and armed conflict. This forum, held in Warsaw in May 2000, produced a number of recommendations on how OSCE should integrate the protection and rights of children affected by armed conflict into its work. The Chairperson-in-Office is working to ensure appropriate follow-up to these recommendations at the next meeting of the Ministerial Council in November 2000.

2. Council of Europe

28. In April 2000, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe held three debates highlighting the growing need to ensure the rights and protection of children continent-wide. The Assembly agreed that child soldiers and young victims of the Kosovo conflict needed special support, and also backed plans for a European ombudsman for children.

3. European Union

29. In November 1999, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the protection of war-affected children that supported raising the age limit for recruitment and participation in hostilities to 18. This builds on a considerable body of initiatives and activities developed on the issue of children and armed conflict by the European Commission.

4. ACP-EU framework of cooperation

30. Key elements proposed by the Special Representative were endorsed by the Ministerial Negotiating Conference of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group and the European Union (ACP-EU) in 1999 and have been incorporated into the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement signed on 23 June 2000 in Benin. These elements express the intention of the parties to address the problem of child soldiers; to protect children, especially girls, and ensure their rights; to promote reintegration and rehabilitation of children in post-conflict situations; and to demobilize and reintegrate former child soldiers. In March 2000, the ACP-EU Joint Assembly adopted a comprehensive resolution on child soldiers.

5. Organization of African Unity

31. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity adopted the Algiers Declaration in 1999, reaffirming the determination of that organization to work relentlessly to promote the rights and welfare of the child, to combat all forms of child exploitation and to end the phenomenon of child soldiers.

6. Economic Community of West African States

32. The ministers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in April 2000, at a conference sponsored by the Governments of Canada and Ghana with the active support and participation of the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS and the Special Representative, adopted a far-reaching declaration and plan of action to assist children affected by armed conflict in West Africa. The Accra Declaration and Plan of Action contain several important elements, including monitoring the implementation of international norms and standards for child protection, instituting a week of truce for the benefit of war-affected children, training military and peacekeeping personnel in child rights and protection, establishing an office within the ECOWAS Secretariat to protect child victims of war, and controlling illegal cross-border activities through mechanisms such as the ECOWAS moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of small arms. The countries agreed to incorporate child protection into all ECOWAS peacemaking initiatives and peace operations, and to address the socio-economic and political factors that contribute to the occurrence of armed conflict.

7. Organization of American States

33. In June 2000, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States adopted a resolution on children and armed conflict, calling on all parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law relevant to children and urging member States to support efforts to demobilize, reintegrate and rehabilitate children affected by conflict.

8. The Commonwealth

34. Following an appeal by the Special Representative, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, at their meeting in Durban in November 1999, issued the Durban Communiqué, in which they strongly condemned the targeting, abuse, recruitment and deployment of children in armed conflict, and called on all parties concerned to put an end to such practices.

9. G-8 industrialized countries

35. The Special Representative actively lobbied the G-8 industrialized countries to take up the issue of children affected by armed conflict and to promote its inclusion in their political declarations and commitments. Subsequently, the G-8 Ministers for Foreign Affairs issued a report entitled "G-8 Miyazaki Initiatives for Conflict Prevention" at their pre-summit meeting in July 2000, identifying the plight of children affected by armed conflict as one of the most disturbing human security issues facing the world today. The ministers promised to suppress armed conflict by removing the illicit arms and money that fuel it around the world and to cooperate with the United Nations to pressure perpetrators who either targeted or recruited children. They set out concrete measures that can be taken by G-8 countries, either

collectively or individually, to promote the protection of children during and after conflict. Such measures include putting pressure on those who involve or target children in armed conflict; promoting the adoption and implementation of international standards and mechanisms; supporting global and regional outreach initiatives; promoting the protection, rights and welfare of children during peace negotiations, peace consolidation and post-conflict reconstruction; and supporting the work of the Special Representative and United Nations bodies including UNICEF.

D. United Nations system

36. The Special Representative continued to build collaboration with relevant entities of the United Nations system to further integrate the protection of children affected by armed conflict into their activities, planning, programming and budgeting.

1. Economic and Social Council

37. The Office of the Special Representative worked closely with UNICEF again this year to ensure that the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/55/82-E/2000/61) reflected key concerns about children affected by armed conflict. The report emphasized the significance of Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999), 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000) on the protection of civilians. The report also highlighted the importance of the deployment of child protection advisers in United Nations peacekeeping operations, and reiterated the Special Representative's call for concerted international pressure on parties that use child soldiers.

2. Commission on Human Rights

38. In April 2000, the Special Representative addressed the Commission on Human Rights at Geneva during its debate on the rights of the child, and presented his additional report (E/CN.4/2000/71). He urged the Commission to make the rights of children affected by armed conflict a central concern throughout its activities and outcomes, including its monitoring actions, reports of special rapporteurs, experts, representatives and working groups, and resolutions. To ensure that the Commission has reliable and adequate information on violations of the rights of children, he recommended that all relevant Secretariat reports to the Commission include sections on the fate of children affected by armed conflict. The Special Representative also emphasized the important role that the Commission's extra-conventional mechanisms (country-specific and thematic mandates and working groups) and the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights can play to deepen the Commission's understanding of war-affected children and to contribute to the development of new human rights standards to help protect them.

39. The Special Representative called on the Commission on Human Rights and the wider human rights community to make systematic use of Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) as an advocacy tool for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. He met with several of the Commission's special rapporteurs and urged them and the Commission's working groups to incorporate the provisions of resolution 1261 (1999) into their work and to provide information about its implementation in their reports to the Commission.

3. Working group on the Optional Protocol

40. The Special Representative strongly supported the efforts of the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights in drafting the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. He worked closely with the Chair and addressed the Working Group at its final session in January 2000, at which time he urged representatives to bring their negotiations to a close by agreeing on the highest possible standard of protection for children at risk of exploitation as combatants.

4. Committee on the Rights of the Child

41. The Special Representative maintained regular contact with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which has the primary role in monitoring States parties' compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In January 2000, the Office of the Special Representative provided a briefing to the Committee on recent initiatives, including Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) and the deployment of child protection advisers. Committee members were particularly pleased that advisers shall, among other things, monitor implementation of the Convention and the preparation of State parties' reports to the Committee,

and ensure that the Committee's concluding observations are integrated into the work of the peace operation. In short, the advisers should prove to be an important new source of information linking the Committee with United Nations operations in the field.

42. The Office of the Special Representative provided background information and briefing papers to Committee members in advance of their deliberations on the reports of Sierra Leone and Colombia. The Special Representative encourages international and local non-governmental organizations to provide information to the Committee, and encourages the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNICEF to support this process.

5. Department of Peacekeeping Operations

43. The Special Representative has worked very closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat to keep abreast of situations on the ground and to ensure that the protection of war-affected children is incorporated into the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council. The Office of the Special Representative participated in inter-agency task forces convened by the Department on particular conflict areas, including Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo and East Timor. The Office of the Special Representative also collaborated with the Department to develop lessons learned on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers in peacekeeping environments. In addition, the Office of the Special Representative worked closely with the Department on the establishment of the role and the deployment of child protection advisers within United Nations peace operations.

6. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

44. The Special Representative held consultations with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on several initiatives of mutual concern, including the implementation of Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), the provision of information to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and follow-up to the work of the Commission on Human Rights relevant to children and armed conflict.

45. The Office of the Special Representative has continued to work with the Office of the High Commissioner to draft the terms of reference for child protection advisers and on the deployment of child protection staff within the human rights components of peacekeeping operations, and to ensure that United Nations peace operation personnel receive appropriate training in human rights and humanitarian law, particularly as it pertains to children, women, refugees and other vulnerable populations. At the request of the Office of the High Commissioner, the Special Representative co-hosted the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on 9 August 2000 and opened a panel discussion on indigenous youth and armed conflict.

46. The Office of the Special Representative has maintained very active collaboration with the field presences of the Office of the High Commissioner in particular countries. The field operation in Colombia has provided information on the protection of child rights in the context of the armed conflict there, and assisted in follow-up activities to the Special Representative's visit to Colombia in 1999. The Special Representative's recommendation that two child rights officers be deployed to the human rights component of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was accepted by the Security Council. The presence of child rights officers together with the senior child protection adviser has helped to ensure greater attention to children's rights within the context of the peace process. The field staff and presences of the Office of the High Commissioner have also supported the efforts of the Special Representative in Burundi.

47. The Special Representative has recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner look into the development of strategies to ensure the systematic integration of children's rights within its activities. He has suggested that the Office develop greater expertise in particular areas of children's rights, including post-conflict situations and periods of "imperfect peace", so that it can provide technical cooperation and further develop its role as a resource in this area. Among specific activities that might be considered is the development of guidelines and monitoring manuals for the field offices and the special procedures. The Special Representative has recommended that, as a general rule, monitoring and reporting on children's rights be included in the mandates of the field offices to ensure consistent attention to the issue, and that the offices be provided with experts where necessary.

7. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

48. The Special Representative has continued to collaborate closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in several areas. UNHCR contributed to the drafting of the terms of reference for child protection advisers with peacekeeping operations. UNHCR field offices in Burundi, Rwanda, Colombia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere have supported the Special Representative during his country visits and follow-up efforts. The Special Representative is working with UNHCR to highlight the situation and improve response to the needs of internally displaced and refugee children. He has sought to raise greater awareness of the need for systematic attention to refugee and internally displaced children. In this regard, the Special Representative welcomed a recent initiative, endorsed by the Executive Committee of UNHCR, to deploy humanitarian security officers to crisis areas to assess the situation and provide expertise on special programmes relating to the prevention of sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence and the protection of refugee children from recruitment by armed forces or groups.

8. United Nations Children's Fund

49. In the reporting period, the Special Representative has devoted considerable time to discussions and consultations with the Executive Director and senior staff of UNICEF to build collaboration and support. He collaborated with UNICEF on a wide range of initiatives, including the preparation of the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, the development of terms of reference for child protection advisers and the subsequent recruitment and deployment of child protection advisers to particular peace operations, coordination for country visits, neighbourhood initiatives, and preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the World Summit for Children in 2001. The Special Representative also worked with UNICEF to advance the protection of children involved in truth and justice-seeking processes within the context of the Steering Committee on Children and Justice (see para. 16 above).

9. Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons

50. The Special Representative has maintained a close working relationship with Francis Deng, Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. The Special Representative's country visits and advocacy have helped to generate and focus greater attention on the plight of internally displaced children. In addition, the Special Representative has coordinated with the Representative on internally displaced persons on his country visits and on issues of mutual concern being raised in United Nations forums, including the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights.

10. Executive committees

51. The Special Representative continued to work through the executive committee system within the United Nations to promote awareness and initiatives on behalf of children affected by armed conflict. The Special Representative reported regularly to the Executive Committee on Peace and Security and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs on country visits and other initiatives. He provided background notes and briefings on Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) for both committees. The Office of the Special Representative also actively participated in the Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs.

E. Placing protection of children on peace agendas

52. Children must be part of peace agendas, not only to address their needs and rights, but to ensure a lasting peace. During the reporting period, the Special Representative worked to ensure that the Burundi peace agreement of 28 August 2000 fully incorporated the rights and protection of children. He travelled to Sierra Leone and Northern Ireland to advocate that children's concerns be addressed as stipulated in the Lomé and Good Friday Agreements respectively, and that young people be involved in the consolidation of peace.

F. Neighbourhood initiatives

53. Although most of today's armed conflicts are internal, they are often exacerbated by cross-border activities, such as the flow of small arms, the illicit trade in natural resources, the recruitment and abduction of children, the movement of displaced persons and the separation of families. To effectively address these threats, the Special Representative has developed "neighbourhood initiatives" to engage subregional actors in dialogue that would lead to specific agreements and concrete measures to protect children. His efforts in the current reporting period have focused largely on West Africa. Efforts in eastern Africa have also progressed, while efforts in the Balkan region, particularly the neighbourhood of Kosovo, have not advanced in the course of this reporting period.

1. West Africa neighbourhood

54. The Special Representative has sought to engage ECOWAS to address cross-border security issues in West Africa. ECOWAS has played a prominent role in the effort to address armed conflict in the subregion, particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone, including a moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of small arms and light weapons.

55. The Office of the Special Representative has been working actively with ECOWAS and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs to establish a child protection unit within ECOWAS, as stipulated in the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action. In August 2000, representatives of the Special Representative and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs conducted a needs assessment mission in Nigeria and Sierra Leone to identify gaps between the present capacities of ECOWAS and its requirements for the effective running of the Unit.

56. The Child Protection Unit will serve as a special advisory unit to the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and is expected to be operational early in 2001. The implementation of the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action will be the first stage in the Unit's long-term goal of preventing the systematic abuse of children and ensuring the promotion of their rights and welfare across West Africa. The Unit will play a central role in coordinating national efforts and mechanisms for child protection, including in countries not directly affected by war. Those mechanisms include, for example, the National Commission for War-Affected Children in Sierra Leone, the Eminent Persons Group for Children in Liberia and the Commission for Children in Ghana. The Special Representative will continue to work closely with the Unit and monitor developments in ECOWAS, with a view to sharing this experience with other regional organizations.

2. Eastern Africa neighbourhood

57. In 1999, the Special Representative held discussions with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Canada, Ghana, Kenya and Norway to seek their support in developing various initiatives to protect children from cross-border threats in East Africa. In March 2000, responding in part to the Special Representative's appeal, the Government of Kenya, with the support of the Government of Norway, convened the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa Conference on the Proliferation of Small Arms. Ten regional countries participated at the ministerial level. The conference issued the Nairobi Declaration, which proposed a number of regional cooperative measures to curb illegal arms flows.

3. Neighbourhood of Kosovo

58. During the reporting period, the Special Representative sought to promote the neighbourhood initiative for Kosovo in the context of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. He held extensive discussions on the matter at the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar on Children and Armed Conflict, held in Warsaw in May 2000. The renewed outbreak of conflict in Kosovo interrupted earlier plans for a mission by the Special Representative to the region, but discussions on this have recently been renewed.

G. Country visits

59. During the reporting period, the Special Representative or representatives of his Office conducted field visits to Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland, East and West Timor, and Colombia.

1. Sierra Leone

60. The Special Representative paid a brief visit to Sierra Leone on 29 and 30 April 2000, jointly with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, Lloyd Axworthy, immediately after the Accra conference on war-affected children. The objectives of the mission

were twofold: to follow up on previous visits and initiatives, especially the establishment of the National Commission for War-Affected Children and to draw attention on the ground to the outcome of the Accra conference. It was his fourth visit to the country in two years.

61. The Special Representative and Mr. Axworthy were received by the President of Sierra Leone, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who updated them on developments in the peace process. President Kabbah informed the Special Representative of his decision to establish a National Commission for War-Affected Children in Sierra Leone. The Special Representative had urged the establishment of such a commission during his previous visits and welcomed this development. He also welcomed the willingness of donor Governments, particularly Canada, to provide financial support for the establishment and functioning of the Commission. The Special Representative has been working closely with the Government of Sierra Leone to put the structures in place for the establishment of the Commission.

62. In Sierra Leone, the Special Representative also visited war-affected children. During the war, many children have been deliberately maimed, with their limbs brutally cut off. Thousands of children have been abducted, forced to kill, and sexually abused. The Special Representative and Mr. Axworthy visited the Murray Town Amputee and War Wounded Camp in Freetown and the St. Michael's Interim Care Centre in Lakka, both of which he had visited during his previous trip to Sierra Leone. Thereafter, the Special Representative and Mr. Axworthy held separate meetings with Major Johnny Paul Koromah and Corporal Foday Sankoh, leader of the Revolutionary United Front; and held a joint meeting with a cross-section of leaders of civil society.

63. The Special Representative made the following observations during this visit to Sierra Leone:

(a) *Security and disarmament*. There was a common perception that the prospects for conducting elections by next February were bleak if basic security arrangements could not be established. Without disarmament and free access to all parts of Sierra Leone, questions would be raised about elections in which many might be unable to vote.

(b) *The diamond factor*. There has been increasing recognition of the linkages between the illicit trafficking in diamonds from Sierra Leone and the fuelling of the conflict, which has had a disproportionate impact on children and civilians. Sierra Leone civil society had gradually become involved in the campaign to raise international awareness on this issue. The problem of illicit trafficking in diamonds served to compound the disarmament process given the relatively limited extent of disarmament and demobilization in diamond-producing areas.

(c) *Marginalization of youth*. Many Sierra Leoneans expressed their concern about the growing alienation among young people, who feel used, discouraged and abandoned. Many in this group suffer from illiteracy, and unemployment and are becoming victims of drug abuse. There is much bitterness and anger within the youth population.

(d) *The special problem of amputees*. Many of the same people the Special Representative had met during his earlier visit in September 1999 were still in residence at the Murray Town amputee camp this year. The Government of Sierra Leone, with the help of the international community, faces the difficult challenge of providing longer-term, community-based physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration for this group of victims. Such programmes should take particular care to foster the health, self-respect and dignity of child victims.

Visit of the Office of the Special Representative

64. During the reporting period, the Office of the Special Representative participated in a consultative workshop on the National Commission for War-Affected Children, convened from 16 to 18 August 2000 by the Government of Sierra Leone with the support of the UNICEF country office and the Government of Canada. The workshop produced a set of recommendations regarding the structure, role and objectives of the National Commission and the procedures for its formal establishment. The participants concluded that the Commission should be formally established early in 2001 and that its principal objectives should be:

- To advocate for and facilitate the implementation of international norms and standards on the rights of children and act as an ombudsman for children;
- To develop and help to implement policies to ensure access to education for war-affected

children in collaboration with the Government and non-governmental organizations;

- To ensure access to basic services, particularly in the areas of health, education and social welfare for war-affected children;
- To facilitate the increased participation of young people in the peace-building and democratic processes;
- To develop strong linkages with other institutions (e.g., the proposed ECOWAS child protection unit).

2. Northern Ireland

65. The Special Representative visited Northern Ireland from 26 to 28 June 2000 to assess at first hand the impact of the "Troubles" on children, to see steps being taken to translate the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement into protection for children on the ground, to participate in an international conference on children and peace in Northern Ireland, to raise awareness of the importance of paying particular attention to children throughout the consolidation of peace, and to encourage and support the participation of young people in the building of peace across segregated communities and political divides.

66. During his visit, the Special Representative had meetings with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Peter Mandelson; the Presiding Officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Lord Alderdice; the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alderman Sammy Wilson; the Minister of Education for Northern Ireland, Martin McGuinness; Ministers Denis Haughey and Dermot Nesbitt from the offices of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister; and the Victims Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield; Marie Smyth, of the Cost of the Troubles Study Project and representative of Community Conflict Impact on Children; Sheri Chamberlein, Director of Save the Children/Northern Ireland; and Mike Aaronson, Director-General of Save the Children/UK. He met with some 30 local non-governmental organizations involved in the promotion and protection of children's rights in Northern Ireland.

67. He visited several Nationalist and Unionist communities in Belfast, including Ardoyne, New Lodge and the Shankill Road. He held extensive discussions with young people, as well as with the Youth Forum, a non-governmental organization that engages young people as active citizens to make changes in their society, and with the Youth Committee, comprising young people from across Northern Ireland who had taken an active role in preparing the conference and hosting his visit. He commended efforts to develop cross-community initiatives such as the government-funded Education for Mutual Understanding programme, which employs curricular projects as well as sport and the arts to bridge the sectarian divide. He visited two partner schools involved in the programme, St. Theresa's (Catholic) and Elmgrove (Protestant).

68. The Special Representative gave a keynote address at the conference held on the theme Building the Future: Young People and the Troubles, which was hosted by Community Conflict Impact on Children and Save the Children/Northern Ireland. The principal objectives of the conference were to highlight the effect of the troubles on children; examine the ways in which other societies have addressed similar circumstances; and bring together experts to share their experiences with people in Northern Ireland.

69. Although the long-standing conflict in Northern Ireland has been one of low intensity and therefore quite different from situations of full-blown war, it has nevertheless had a significant impact on children. The visit reinforced the Special Representative's conviction that children's concerns must remain priority concerns throughout the building of peace and that the voices of young people should be heard throughout peace processes. He was very impressed by the capacity of the young people he spent time with to reach out and embrace reconciliation in spite of their own devastating personal experiences arising from the conflict. He learned from the experiences of government leaders, non-governmental organization representatives, and researchers he met, and shared with them many of the lessons he has learned from other conflict situations:

(a) *Sustained and concerted attention to children is needed throughout the consolidation of peace*. The Special Representative was very encouraged during the visit by the commitment of political leaders to the Good Friday Agreement and the positive initiatives undertaken at local levels for the benefit of children by non-governmental organizations and educators. The Special Representative appealed to political leaders to address the basic concerns of

children in Northern Ireland, particularly social and educational integration, youth unemployment, substance abuse and poverty, improved access to health facilities and housing, increased access to counselling, and improved administration of child protection and juvenile justice. Children's rights should be incorporated into the new Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. The consultative Civic Forum established by the Good Friday Agreement should include representatives of children's rights agencies and non-governmental organizations.

(b) *A new body is needed to consolidate the focus on children's rights in Northern Ireland.* The Special Representative expressed strong support for the establishment of a new body dedicated to promoting children's rights in Northern Ireland and ensuring that the concerns of young people are translated into policy-making, priority-setting and sustained resource allocation. Ideas under discussion among non-governmental organizations, children's rights groups, and political leaders include the establishment of a cabinet Ministry for Children, a Commission for Children, and an Ombudsman for Children. The lessons learned from other post-conflict situations demonstrate that in the absence of such a body it is easy to overlook children's rights, with children and the wider society paying a high price later for such neglect.

(c) *Remove children from paramilitary activity and address issues of community security.* The Special Representative urges all parties to the Good Friday Agreement to insist that paramilitary organizations refrain immediately from recruiting or using children in the youth wings of their organizations or involving them in violence in any way. Punishment beatings should also be halted immediately. Emergency legislation that provides for the detention of very young children should be reviewed, and police should receive training in children's rights and protection.

(d) *Support the capacity of families and teachers to protect children.* Family stability and support help mediate the impact of violence on children. Parents have an essential role to play in dispelling myths about "others" and fomenting a culture of respect for diversity. The Government needs to provide more support for families and parents affected by violence, living in segregated environments, and hampered in their own ability to build bridges with neighbouring communities. Educators and other members of civil society working to encourage cross-community links need to be given adequate and sustained support.

(e) *Bring lessons learned elsewhere to bear on behalf of children in Northern Ireland.* The Special Representative found young people, representatives of non-governmental organizations, politicians and educators to be very interested in the lessons learned from similar situations elsewhere in the world, particularly concerning the needs of children and victims in highly segregated societies. More must be done at the national and international levels to develop an accessible body of lessons learned in the area of protection and rehabilitation of children affected by violence. The Special Representative intends to continue his collaboration with young people, non-governmental organizations and government decision makers in Northern Ireland, and to assist them in their effort to construct community-based programmes for children affected by the troubles, on the basis of international best practice in this area, as called for in the Good Friday Agreement.

(f) *Ensure youth participation in the consolidation of peace in Northern Ireland.* The Special Representative was particularly heartened by the determination of young people he met to reach out to one another across community lines; many were very impressive in articulating their personal commitment to tolerance and their aspirations for a peaceful Northern Ireland. He strongly encouraged youth participation in the building and consolidation of peace in Northern Ireland. He urged the Youth Committee, the Youth Forum, students involved in the Education for Mutual Understanding programme, and other young people across Northern Ireland to consolidate their priorities into a manifesto or agenda for children. He encouraged children across Northern Ireland to reach out to one another, and initiated a discussion of the possibility of linking children in Northern Ireland to children in other societies as a part of the children-to-children network initiative. He urged political leaders, members of civil society, and non-governmental organizations to listen and respond to the voices of young people.

3. East and West Timor

70. The Office of the Special Representative undertook a joint mission to East and West Timor from 14 to 21 June 2000 with the Japan Committee for UNICEF and its Goodwill Ambassador. The visit

enabled the Office to assess at first hand the situation of children in East Timor after the violence that followed the national consultation of 1999, and the condition of child refugees in West Timor, and to consult with various actors regarding concrete measures to ensure the protection and rights of children during the reconstruction period.

71. On-site visits were conducted to refugee camps in West Timor. In East Timor assessment visits were conducted to assistance projects and local communities, primary schools, a training workshop for youth groups, an orphanage and a childcare centre. Meetings and consultations were also held with members of the United Nations country team including the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET), UNICEF, UNHCR, the World Bank, representatives of international non-governmental organizations, and local political leaders.

72. Following the popular consultation on the future status of East Timor, held in August 1999, over one third of East Timor's population of 890,000 persons fled or were forced to cross the border into West Timor. This relatively large influx placed particular strain on the local population, which in certain communities has been outnumbered by refugees. Some 126,000 remain in refugee camps or local communities in West Timor. Registration of the refugee population remains incomplete, but United Nations agencies estimate that the majority of the population is made up of women and children. Most refugees live in improvised shelters and overcrowded environments, their access to health care and food is limited, most severely, during the rainy season. There have been reports of violence and intimidation in the camps.

73. The explosive violence that followed the referendum destroyed the basic health and education infrastructure of East Timor. UNICEF estimates that some 90 per cent of schools were destroyed or badly damaged. In addition, there is a shortage of human resources, including teachers at the secondary school and higher education levels and health care providers. Local and international groups in East Timor are debating how best to protect children who have been separated from their families or orphaned. A consortium of international non-governmental organizations reports a significant number of children experiencing psychosocial problems as a result of their exposure to the violence. Adolescents who have lost access to schooling also face a high unemployment rate and rising living costs. Gangs and crimes are reportedly on the rise among young people.

74. Impressive efforts have been made to protect children during the emergency and the ensuing reconstruction phases in East Timor. On the basis of on-site assessments and consultations on the ground, the Office of the Special Representative has put forward several recommendations intended to enhance existing efforts and ensure that children's concerns are given due consideration in all relevant policy discussions and the design and implementation of relevant programmes. These recommendations include:

- The establishment of a national commission for children;
- The placement of a senior child protection adviser within UNTAET;
- The integration of child-related provisions into legislation and policy-making;
- The provision of child rights training for United Nations peacekeeping personnel;
- Awareness-building concerning child rights among the general population;
- Programmes to address psychosocial trauma;
- Local capacity-building;
- Early rehabilitation of basic services and the development of radio programming for children.

4. Colombia

75. The Special Representative visited Colombia from 7 to 9 April 2000 to attend the Thirteenth Ministerial Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Cartagena. During his visit, the Special Representative spent time at the Nelson Mandela settlement outside the city, home to an estimated 25,000 internally displaced people. He was able to assess at first hand the situation of internally displaced children in the region, following last year's longer visit to Colombia, and to consult with the main agencies working with displaced persons on the ground.

76. During the reporting period, the Special Representative followed the situation in Colombia closely, particularly concerning his appeals last year to bring to an end the practice of child soldiering in Colombia. On 27 December 1999, he congratulated the

Government of Colombia for discharging the final contingent of 950 soldiers under the age of 18. In April 2000, after another appeal from the Special Representative, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) said they had "committed an error" in recruiting youth under 15 and had repudiated the practice. On 5 May, the Special Representative called on FARC to take verifiable concrete action towards demobilizing those children.

H. Outreach to women's organizations

77. Women constitute a powerful force for peace and the protection of children during and after armed conflict. The Special Representative continued his efforts to bring women's voices into peacemaking processes and to work with women's organizations to promote the protection of war-affected children.

78. In February, he addressed African women leaders who were participating in a programme entitled "The Great Lakes Initiative: Women as Partners for Peace", sponsored by the United States Department of State. In March, the Special Representative spoke to the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice. In April, the Special Representative addressed the international conference in support of Sudanese women's participation in the Sudan peace process, sponsored by the Government of the Netherlands, at Maastricht. In May, he addressed the annual meeting of the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace. During the non-governmental organization Millennium Forum he held consultations with women's groups from the Sudan and Uganda, who were seeking to build effective regional women's peace networks. In June, he participated in a panel on advancing the protection of internally displaced women and children, held during the special session of the General Assembly devoted to the five-year review of the Beijing Conference. He gave the keynote address at the annual Voices of Courage awards of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. The Special Representative, via satellite link, addressed the Women as Partners for Peace Conference held at Kigali in June 2000. The objective of this gathering of 180 African women from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, the Sudan and Zimbabwe was to develop an agenda for women's role in peace processes to ensure that women become more systematically a part of the search for peace and for solutions in conflict situations in Africa.

I. Non-governmental organizations

79. Non-governmental organizations play an indispensable role in shaping the agenda for children affected by armed conflict. The Special Representative continued to work closely with them to build national and international advocacy movements, develop operational programmes on the ground to meet children's needs, and monitor and share information concerning the protection of children in particular conflict situations.

80. In the reporting period, the Special Representative sought the input of non-governmental organizations to the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict. In March 2000, an international consultation of non-governmental organizations on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) was organized by World Vision, together with the Office of the Special Representative and the Sub-Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the non-governmental organization Committee on UNICEF, and in May 2000 a similar consultation was held at New York University's Center for the Study of International Organizations. In June, at the request of the Special Representative, World Vision organized a discussion among non-governmental organizations in Geneva to provide input into the Secretary-General's report. In July, the Security Council heard directly from non-governmental organizations when the Special Representative facilitated an Arria formula informal briefing by representatives of the International Save the Children Alliance, World Vision, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, InterAction, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the International Rescue Committee, the International Action Network for Small Arms, and Médecins du Monde.

81. The Special Representative worked actively to support the campaign of Save the Children/UK on behalf of internally displaced children; their recent report *War Brought Us Here* has especially highlighted this issue. He commends their Portrait Pledge for internally displaced children, which was presented to the Secretary-General in New York in July 2000.

82. During the reporting period, the Special Representative addressed a number of important non-governmental organization forums including the non-governmental organization Millennium Forum in New York, which featured 1,350 representatives of civil society from 113 countries. He also addressed events sponsored by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the German National Committee for UNICEF to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the millennium lecture "Innocent victims — protecting children in times of conflict", organized by Save the Children/UK; the launch of the Campaign for Sensitization on Children and Armed Conflict by the Ministry of Labour of Spain and the Spanish National Committee for UNICEF; the International Symposium on Children and Armed Conflict of the Japan National Committee for UNICEF; the National High School Model United Nations Assembly of the United States of America; the eleventh Annual Youth Conference, organized by Global Kids; and the annual meeting of the International Save the Children Alliance. The Special Representative was an expert witness at special hearings organized by the UK Foreign Office and Save the Children/UK on the issue of child soldiers. The Office of the Special Representative also participated in the first hearings on the protection of war-affected children: securing children's rights in the context of armed conflict, organized by the International Bureau for Children's Rights and the Children and Armed Conflict Unit of the University of Essex.

J. Opinion makers

83. The Special Representative brought his advocacy agenda to a number of prominent forums to raise awareness and generate support for children affected by armed conflict. The forums included the Global Peace and Tolerance Awards at United Nations Headquarters; the Youth and Peace Symposium, with Archbishop Desmond Tutu; the seminar for editors on the theme "Conflicts and war crimes: challenges for coverage", organized by the Crimes of War Project and Freedom Forum; the annual Seminar on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping of the International Peace Academy in New York; the launch and first meeting of the Steering Committee of Global Action to Prevent War, Genocide and Internal Armed Conflict; the Fiesta Women 2000 event of the Japan Global Forum; the international humanitarian assistance course of the Center for International Health and Cooperation; the Center for the Global South in Washington, D.C.; the conference on African refugees and the United States response: 20 years of resettlement, organized by the Ethiopian Community Development Council; and the conference on preparing to lead: the role of global corporations in the twenty-first century, of the Aspen Institute. He also addressed the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. In September, the Special Representative discussed the issue of children and conflict on a panel of the State of the World Forum, together with the Executive Director of UNICEF. In June, he briefed business leaders at a meeting on the theme "The United Nations and business: a partnership for the new millennium" organized by the United Nations Office for Project Services.

K. Media

84. Media outreach is a crucial part of the Special Representative's advocacy work. During the past year, he contributed opinion pieces to several influential newspapers including the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Globe and Mail* and *El Tiempo*. Articles or editorials on the work of his Office also appeared in newspapers and magazines including The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *El Pais*, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the *Boston Globe*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Der Spiegel*, the *Economist Intelligence Unit*, *El Espectador*, *Newsweek*, *Istoé*, *Die Presse* and the TWA in-flight magazine.

85. On television, he appeared twice on the CNN International programme *Q & A with Riz Khan*, took part in the network's millennium round-table discussion programme and appeared in the powerful CNN documentary *Cry Freetown*. He also took part in programmes as diverse as *Foreign Correspondent* (ABC, Australia), *The National Magazine* (CBC, Canada) and *Human Rights, Human Wrongs* (BBC 2, United Kingdom). He also served as a panellist at the New York screening of the HBO film *Children in War*. The Special Representative participated in the Aspen Institute's fiftieth anniversary symposium on globalization and the human condition; this was subsequently broadcast on the United States cable channel C-Span. In addition, he took part in a special edition of David Gergen's *World at Large* programme on United States public television.

86. On radio, the Special Representative participated in several BBC projects, including *Visionaries*, *Suffer the Children* and the live BBC World Service online phone-in programme *Talking Point*. BBC Radio 4's profile of the Special Representative, *Children in Arms*, won a One World Broadcasting Award for the advancement of children's rights. He was also interviewed by networks including National Public Radio (United States), Radio France Internationale, Radio Japan (NHK), Radio Netherlands and the Voice of America.

87. Video news releases were produced from material from Albania, Colombia, Sierra Leone and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which were used by CNN International, CNN Spanish, BBC World television, NHK and various national channels.

L. Developing the web site

88. The Office of the Special Representative put considerable effort into the development of a comprehensive and user-friendly web site, which is regularly updated to include the latest information, fact sheets, press releases and country profiles, as well as important United Nations documents and links to selected non-governmental organizations. The site benefited from a new graphic design, structural improvements and streamed video/audio content. The address is www.un.org/children/conflict.

IV. Progress achieved during the first mandate

> *There has indeed been great progress in many areas... One of the crucial recommendations in the original report has been fulfilled beyond expectation with the appointment of Mr. Olara Otunnu as the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. His advocacy on behalf of war-affected children has raised the profile of this issue to the extent that is now placed firmly on the international peace and security agenda.* (Graça Machel)*

89. Over the past three years, the work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, and Governments, has resulted in tangible progress in respect of children affected by armed conflict. Advocacy and engagement on the issue has increased dramatically. Children are now more central to the peace and security agenda. War crimes against children have been prosecuted and violations are now being documented and reported more systematically. International standards have been strengthened. Children are actively involved in building peace. Humanitarian assistance is increasingly focusing on meeting the rights and needs of war-affected children. Warring parties have made concrete commitments to respecting children's rights and international humanitarian law. However, while significant progress has been achieved, action to protect children must be deepened and intensified.

A. Placing war-affected children high on the international political agenda

90. Advocacy by the Special Representative and other key actors has succeeded in placing the protection and rights of war-affected children high on the international political agenda.

* Introduction to *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. A critical review of progress made and obstacles encountered in increasing protection for war-affected children* (forthcoming).

1. Security Council

91. The Special Representative has made it a priority to make the protection of children affected by armed conflict a major issue on the agenda of the Security Council. Over the course of the first mandate this has translated into a number of concrete outcomes.

- June 1998: The Council held its first open debate on the issue of children and armed conflict and issued a presidential statement, which set the foundation for further engagement.
- August 1999: Second open debate on children and armed conflict and adoption of resolution 1261 (1999). This is a landmark for war-affected children, which formally affirms that that their protection is a peace and security concern which belongs on the agenda of the Security Council.
- August 1999: Child protection was included in the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone and the deployment of a senior child protection adviser was approved.
- November 1999: Child protection was included in the mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo together with the deployment of child protection advisers to that mission.
- July 2000: The Secretary-General submitted to the Security Council the first report devoted to children and armed conflict.
- July 2000: Third open debate on children and armed conflict.
- August 2000: Adoption of resolution 1314 (2000), the second resolution on children and armed conflict, which put in place key building blocks for the protection of war-affected children, as a follow-up to resolution 1261 (1999).

In addition, since 1998, numerous presidential statements, resolutions, and open debates in the Security Council have made significant references to children and armed conflict. The Special Representative also briefed the Council on several occasions after his visits to particular countries.

2. Regional organizations

92. Throughout the first phase of the mandate, the Special Representative lobbied for high-level political and diplomatic support from major regional organizations for initiatives on children and armed conflict. As a result, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the G-8 industrialized countries, the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity, the Economic Community of West African States and the Commonwealth have all taken important steps to make the protection of children affected by armed conflict a vital part of their agendas through policy declarations and commitments. These significant steps taken by regional organizations on behalf of children mark a major breakthrough, especially since most of them had not previously seen this issue as belonging on their agendas.

3. Incorporating children's rights into an international cooperation agreement

93. The Special Representative proposed the inclusion of the protection and rights of children, especially war-affected children, into the African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Union framework of cooperation. The ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, concluded in February 2000, is the first development cooperation agreement to incorporate the rights of children and to explicitly designate children as beneficiaries of the agreement. Setting the parameters for trade and development cooperation between the 15 European Union countries and the 71 ACP States, the agreement contains provisions on protecting children's rights, rehabilitating and reintegrating children in post-conflict situations, and helping community-based institutions to ensure the protection and development of children.

4. Gaining the support of Governments

94. A number of Governments have responded to the Special Representative's call to make the protection of children a prominent feature of their domestic and international policy agenda. They have applied their influence to advance the issues within multilateral and regional forums. The Special Representative has continued to urge Governments to apply concerted pressure on those who are abusing children in conflict situations and to take action to discourage corporate actors within their jurisdiction from engaging in commercial activities with parties to armed conflict that engage in systematic violations of international

standards that protect children in time of armed conflict.

5. Major international conferences

95. A series of major international conferences devoted to the theme of children affected by armed conflict, convened during the first phase of the mandate, have played an important role in placing this issue prominently on the international political, humanitarian and development agenda. They include the following:

96. The **London Symposium on Children and Armed Conflict** held in June 1998, initiated by the Special Representative and hosted by the United Kingdom as President of the European Union, generated political support from the European Union, and further consolidated partnerships with Governments, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions for the protection of war-affected children. The symposium was the first to bring together a broad group of actors on the issue.

97. The **Tokyo Symposium on Children and Armed Conflict** held in November 1998, organized by the Government of Japan and the Japan Committee for UNICEF in cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative, helped to raise awareness in the Asia-Pacific region, and enhanced government and non-governmental organization support for the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

98. The **ministerial conference of the Economic Community of West African States on war-affected children**, held at Accra in April 2000, co-sponsored by the Governments of Ghana and Canada with the active support and participation of the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS and the Special Representative, resulted in the far-reaching Accra Declaration and Plan of Action to protect war-affected children in West Africa.

99. The **OSCE Human Dimension Seminar on Children and Armed Conflict**, held in Warsaw in May 2000, recommended that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe integrate the protection and rights of children affected by armed conflict into its work, including addressing the issue within all bodies of OSCE, developing policies to promote and protect children affected by armed conflict, designating focal points on children in relevant field operations, and ensuring adequate training of staff.

100. The **International Conference on War-Affected Children** was hosted by the Government of Canada at Winnipeg in September 2000. It was the largest international conference on the issue of children and armed conflict ever held, bringing together non-governmental organizations, young people, United Nations representatives, senior government officials and ministers from 130 countries. The Agenda for Action adopted by the ministerial meeting, and other records of the proceedings were handed over to the Special Representative. The outcomes of this conference will provide useful input into the shaping of the Special Representative's programme of action for the second mandate and the platform for children and armed conflict being prepared for the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly.

101. The **special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the World Summit for Children** to be held in 2001, which will review progress made over the past decade towards achieving the goals set out during the 1990 World Summit, has been in the planning stages throughout this reporting period. The Special Representative has held discussions with UNICEF on the preparatory process and the special session itself. The Special Representative was invited by the General Assembly to participate in the preparatory process as well as in the special session. In May 2000 the Special Representative addressed the session of the Preparatory Committee on emerging issues. He proposed that the special session should produce a plan of action with specific benchmarks for the distinct issue of children and armed conflict. The Special Representative will continue to spearhead the process of shaping the agenda on the issue of children and armed conflict.

6. Media outreach

102. Media outreach has been a key element of the Special Representative's efforts to mobilize international public opinion on behalf of children affected by armed conflict. Engagement with media through print, broadcasting and the Internet has significantly raised the profile of children's issues on international political agendas and has heightened public awareness. In 1999, for example, there were 63 articles in leading newspapers and magazines, 31 television interviews, 39 radio interviews and 32 press briefings.

B. Integrating the protection and rights of children into peace processes and peace operations

1. Placing child protection on peace agendas

103. Although children suffer disproportionately in times of war, they have been absent from peace agendas. The Special Representative has strongly advocated for the inclusion of child protection concerns in peace agendas and peace accords. The Security Council has endorsed this call, and has urged all parties to conflict to take the rights and protection of children into account during peace talks. To achieve this goal, the Special Representative has held consultations with mediators and parties in conflict and made specific proposals. To date child protection is explicitly mentioned in the peace agreements reached in Burundi in August 2000, Sierra Leone in July 1999 and Northern Ireland in April 1998. In addition, during the course of the first mandate, the Special Representative obtained commitments from Governments and insurgent groups in the Sudan and Colombia to place the rights and protection of children on the agendas of their ongoing peace processes.

2. Incorporating child protection into peacekeeping mandates

104. Peacekeeping missions have a critical role to play in providing protection to children. The Special Representative has successfully advocated for the protection of children to be systematically incorporated into peacekeeping mandates. So far, this has resulted in the Security Council's inclusion of child protection provisions in the mandates of two United Nations peacekeeping operations, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

3. Child protection advisers

105. The Special Representative lobbied the Security Council and United Nations partners for the establishment of the role of child protection advisers in United Nations peacekeeping operations to advise the head of the mission regarding action and coordination for the protection and rights of war-affected children. This proposal was accepted by the Security Council in 1999 and the terms of reference were completed the same year. The first advisers were deployed at the beginning of 2000 to Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council reaffirmed in resolution 1314 (2000) its readiness to include child protection advisers in future missions.

4. Training of peace operation personnel

106. The recommendation by the Special Representative that United Nations personnel involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building activities have appropriate training on the rights and protection of children has been endorsed by the Security Council, notably in resolutions 1261 (1999), 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000).

5. Including children and armed conflict in regular reports to the Security Council

107. Through sustained advocacy, the Special Representative, working with United Nations partners and non-governmental organizations, has ensured that relevant reports to the Security Council on specific situations and thematic concerns include sections on child protection. Such child protection sections have now become an established feature of regular reports to the Security Council.

C. Country-specific initiatives

1. Country visits

108. The country visits by the Special Representative have been an effective advocacy tool, helping to draw significant attention to the situation of children affected by armed conflict. Since the inception of the mandate, the Special Representative has conducted 17 country visits, 7 of which have been follow-up visits.

109. A framework for collaboration on children and armed conflict has been established within United Nations country teams, and between them and non-governmental organizations. At the level of political and diplomatic support, outcomes of country visits have included commitments from parties to conflict, an increase in donor resources committed to initiatives targeted at war-affected children, and a significant growth in non-governmental organization advocacy and programmatic activities.

2. Obtaining commitments from parties to conflict

110. The Special Representative has secured commitments for the protection of children from

government and insurgent groups in Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and the Sudan. During the first mandate, 36 commitments were obtained, 9 of which have been fully met. On most occasions, this was the first time that the parties to conflict had given any undertaking to observe humanitarian and human rights standards. Commitments included such stipulations as refraining from the recruitment or use of young persons within their ranks, ensuring humanitarian access to populations in distress, respecting the protections afforded civilian populations in international humanitarian law, refraining from the use of landmines, and observing humanitarian ceasefires for purposes of vaccination or relief supply. (A full description of the commitments obtained by the Special Representative is provided in his most recent report to the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2000/71).)

3. Developing local initiatives

111. The Special Representative has worked during the course of the first mandate to advocate and facilitate the development of local initiatives on behalf of war-affected children. These include:

- National Commission for War-Affected Children in Sierra Leone — the first institution of its kind;
- Parliamentary Caucus for Children in Sierra Leone;
- Eminent Persons' Group in Liberia, composed of elders, educators, business persons, advocates, religious and civil society leaders;
- Sudanese Women for Peace, a non-partisan grass-roots peace initiative;
- Children as a Zone of Peace in Sri Lanka;
- New law in Rwanda allowing girls to inherit property.

D. Making children a central concern in post-conflict response

112. The Special Representative has advocated that all post-conflict programmes make the needs of children a central concern in policy-making, priority setting, and resource allocation. He has called on key actors responsible for designing post-conflict peace-building programmes, in particular national Governments, the World Bank, the European Union, United Nations agencies, bilateral aid agencies and non-governmental organizations to ensure a concerted and effective response to a range of child relevant issues, including demobilization and reintegration, resettlement of families and displaced children, programmes for physical and psychosocial rehabilitation, and education. This advocacy has started to create new awareness and response, as can be seen in East Timor, Sierra Leone, Kosovo and Guatemala.

E. Strengthening and developing international norms to protect children

113. During the course of the first mandate, the Special Representative made it a priority to strengthen standards and norms to protect war-affected children. Advocacy by the Special Representative, non-governmental organizations, United Nations partners and key Governments resulted in several new instruments for children's protection, as well as the incorporation of children's rights concerns into broader international instruments. They are:

- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted July 1998, classifies war crimes against children and women;
- The Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which entered into force in March 1999;
- The International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 defines child soldiering as one of the worst forms of child labour and sets 18 as the minimum age for forced or compulsory recruitment. It was adopted in June 1999 and is expected to enter into force in November 2000;
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child — the first regional treaty establishing age 18 as a minimum age for all recruitment and participation in hostilities — entered into force in November 1999;
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, establishing 18 as the minimum age for participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment was adopted by the

General Assembly in May 2000 and opened for signature and ratification in June.

F. Launching an era of application for norms

114. Since the beginning of his mandate the Special Representative has advocated launching an "era of application" for international and local norms for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. This proposal was adopted by the Senior Management Group chaired by the Secretary-General. Consequently, a task force was established at the United Nations in 1999, and a report entitled "Strategy for an era of application of international law" was adopted by the Senior Management Group and approved by the Secretary-General in June 2000.

115. The Special Representative has advocated persistently for the implementation of international instruments that protect war-affected children. He has vigorously promoted the Convention on the Rights of the Child by calling on parties to armed conflict to adhere to its provisions and urging Governments to comply with the conclusions and recommendations of the Convention's monitoring body, the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

G. Reasserting traditional values and norms

116. The Special Representative has strongly advocated and highlighted the importance of local values and norms that have traditionally provided for the protection of children and women, especially in times of conflict. His advocacy has succeeded in making this issue an important aspect of international discourse on child protection. The Secretary-General, in his recent report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, endorsed the Special Representative's call on this issue.

H. Countering impunity

117. Throughout his mandate, the Special Representative has urged Governments and parties to conflict to confront the issue of impunity for egregious crimes committed against children in times of war. The General Assembly, Security Council and the Commission on Human Rights have each echoed his call for an end to impunity for such crimes. Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1314 (2000) emphasize State responsibility to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Viewing the International Criminal Court as a significant vehicle for the adjudication of war crimes against children and a potential deterrent to such crimes, the Special Representative has actively participated in efforts to ensure that the Rome Statute and the Rules of Evidence and Procedure of the Court reflect the best interests of children. He also contributed specific proposals designed to ensure that the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which is being established to help bring justice and lasting peace, is designed to protect children who might appear in the proceedings as victims, witnesses and possibly as perpetrators.

I. Engaging and collaborating with non-governmental organizations

118. The Special Representative has made it a priority to engage and collaborate closely with non-governmental organizations for the benefit of children affected by armed conflict. The overall progress achieved to date in carrying out the mandate is due in great part to their tireless work. Non-governmental organizations have galvanized awareness and commitment, developed important activities on the ground, helped to strengthen international standards, published important reports that have increased knowledge of war-affected children, shared essential information, formed effective coalitions on various initiatives, and pressured parties in conflict to protect children.

V. Looking ahead: building a movement for the protection of children affected by conflict

119. In the years ahead, the Special Representative will concentrate on efforts to build a global social and political movement of awareness, pressure and protection for children affected by armed conflict. The emphasis will be on consolidating progress achieved thus far, extending and deepening initiatives in priority areas, with a view to creating a critical and sustainable

mass of activities and developing an era of application on the ground.

Continued engagement of the Security Council

120. The Special Representative will work to ensure adequate follow-up to Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1314 (2000). He will seek to ensure the more effective use of resolution 1261 (1999) as a tool for advocacy, and will encourage the Security Council to continue to incorporate the principles and measures contained in that resolution into its ongoing work. He will take concrete steps to ensure implementation of the targeted measures specified in resolution 1314 (2000).

Regional organizations

121. Now that the issue of children and armed conflict is squarely on the agendas of regional organizations, the Special Representative will work with those organizations to translate declarations and commitments into concrete action. Regional organizations should integrate the rights of war-affected children into their policies, advocacy, resource allocation and field operations; develop regional frameworks for monitoring compliance with agreed norms; and undertake "neighbourhood initiatives" to curb cross-border activities which are harmful to children, particularly the illicit trade in arms and natural resources, and cross-border recruitment and abduction of children.

Placing child protection on peace agendas

122. Children's rights and the protection of children have been included in recent peace agendas in several countries. The Special Representative will work with mediators and parties to conflict to ensure that all future peace negotiations and agreements make the protection of children a priority.

Incorporating child protection into peacekeeping mandates

123. Concrete steps have been taken recently by the United Nations to systematically incorporate child protection concerns into peacekeeping mandates. The Office of the Special Representative will continue to work with the Security Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to ensure that the practice becomes institutionalized.

Post-conflict peace-building for children

124. Following conflict, the prospects of recovery often depend largely on giving priority attention to young people in the rebuilding process, rehabilitating young people affected by war, and restoring their sense of hope. This issue must become a priority. All key actors responsible for developing post-conflict peace-building programmes — in particular national Governments, the World Bank, the European Union, United Nations agencies, bilateral aid agencies and international non-governmental organizations — should make the rights and protection of children a central concern in their planning, programming and resource allocation.

Enhancing compliance by parties to conflict with obligations and commitments

125. The Special Representative will continue to pressure parties to conflict to adhere to such commitments as allowing access to populations in distress; not interfering with the distribution of relief supplies; observing humanitarian ceasefires; not attacking schools or hospitals; not using landmines; and not recruiting or using child soldiers. He will urge international actors such as the Security Council, Governments, United Nations agencies, regional bodies, non-governmental organizations and the media to monitor situations and use their channels of communication and influence to induce compliance. He will advocate for concerted and targeted action by the international community against those that fail to adhere to international norms and standards.

Curbing child soldiering on the ground

126. Now that the Optional Protocol has been adopted, the Special Representative urges the international community to turn its energy to curbing child-soldiering on the ground. This requires a three-pronged approach: putting political pressure on the offending parties; addressing the political, social and economic factors that facilitate the exploitation of children as soldiers; and mobilizing more resources to enlarge capacities for the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-child soldiers.

Eliminating impunity for crimes against children

127. War crimes against children must be punished; those responsible must be held accountable and brought to justice. A common approach is needed to ensure the exclusion of war crimes against children from amnesty provisions and legislation, and the inclusion of child protection provisions and staff within the statutes and structures of international and ad hoc criminal tribunals and truth commissions.

Monitoring and controlling illicit trade in natural resources that fuel conflicts

128. The link between illegal trade in natural resources and prolonged conflict has now been firmly established. The Special Representative will continue to urge Security Council and regional organizations to impose targeted bans on exports from war-affected areas that directly benefit parties to armed conflict who target children and women. Similarly, he will continue to urge the private sector to develop and adopt voluntary codes of conduct regarding such illicit trade. Governments should be encouraged to consider executive and legislative measures to discourage corporate actors within their jurisdiction from engaging in commercial activities with parties to armed conflict who have targeted children and women. The Special Representative is working with non-governmental organizations and youth groups to mount a vigorous campaign against "conflict diamonds".

Signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol and the Rome Statute

129. The Special Representative urges all Governments to sign and ratify the international instruments that provide protection for war-affected children, particularly the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We must work to ensure that the latter comes into force by the end of May 2001, which will be one year after its adoption by the General Assembly.

Facilitating local capacities for advocacy

130. Building local capacity for more effective advocacy, protection and response on behalf of war-affected children is crucial to ensure long-term viability and sustainability. The Special Representative believes that the international community must do far more in this area. The United Nations system, the donor community, and international non-governmental organizations should provide increased support to strengthen the capacities of national institutions, local non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations to assist and protect war-affected children.

Promoting and strengthening local values and norms

131. Throughout history, societies have recognized the fundamental obligation to protect children from harm, even in times of conflict. However, prolonged conflict undermines, and often shatters, the values that hold a society together. These taboos and injunctions need to be reasserted. We must mobilize all resources — parents, extended family, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions — to reclaim and re-establish local values and norms that have traditionally provided for the protection of children, including in times of war.

Providing training for peacekeeping personnel

132. All personnel in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building need training on the rights and protection of children, as stipulated in Security Council resolutions. This is an issue that requires priority action. The Special Representative is working with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR and non-governmental organization partners to develop programmes and materials to ensure training and effective oversight of United Nations personnel working in situations of armed conflict.

Developing the research agenda to fill knowledge gaps

133. Serious gaps in knowledge can constrain international efforts on behalf of children affected by armed conflict. The Special Representative is working to develop a research agenda, focusing on the following areas: the identification of trends in the conduct of warfare that have led to the greater victimization of children; reliable data on the different aspects of the impact of armed conflict on children; the identification of local value systems, customs and

practices that have traditionally protected children in times of conflict; and the assessment of programme interventions made by various actors on behalf of war-affected children and the identification of best practices and lessons learned.

Engaging civil society

134. Outreach to and collaboration with non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups will continue to be a particular priority for the Special Representative, in order to ensure the continuing expansion of initiatives on behalf of war-affected children, particularly advocacy campaigns, operational programmes on the ground, and information-sharing. The Special Representative will build on his earlier work and intensify outreach to and engagement with communities of faith and women's organizations.

Reaching out to and involving young people

135. The Special Representative believes that young people must be involved as an active and integral part of a worldwide social and political movement for the protection of war-affected children — as participants and advocates. The Special Representative will continue to develop several initiatives, including the Voice of Children project and the children-to-children networks.

136. **Voice of Children project.** The Voice of Children project aims to satisfy a hunger for information, recreation and entertainment among children in war-affected areas and give them a vehicle for self-expression. The idea is to systematically develop radio programmes and stations devoted mainly to education and health needs, to promote tolerance and reconciliation, to give voice to children's concerns and to raise awareness about the rights of children. Consultations have been held with international broadcasters, and an initial needs assessment has been conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, East Timor, Liberia and Sierra Leone, to identify a short list of countries for the initial phase of the project, which is to be launched in 2001.

137. **Children-to-children networks.** The Special Representative is working to create communications links among children in war-affected and peaceful countries so they can learn from each other's experiences, and build solidarity and advocacy. The activities of such children-to-children networks could include dialogue, mobilizing support to peers who live in conditions of strife, creating public awareness, supporting reconciliation efforts and peace observances, visits to war-affected countries, and engaging in joint cultural activities. This initiative would also seek to build educational bridges and establish joint educational projects among classrooms in different countries via the Internet. Recent efforts have focused on identifying youth groups and holding consultations with them. The issue was discussed with young people at the conferences on war-affected children that were held at Accra and Winnipeg.

Addressing special vulnerabilities

138. The international community needs to devote special attention and initiatives to particular areas of vulnerability of war-affected children: to provide support for girls and internally displaced children; to obtain the release and rehabilitation of abducted children; to ensure continuous access to education in situations of prolonged warfare and immediate post-conflict periods; and to take action to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in areas of armed conflict.

Promoting collaboration within the United Nations system

139. The Special Representative has placed great emphasis on promoting collaboration within the United Nations system on the protection of children in armed conflict situations. His proposals and actions have led to a number of collaborative initiatives, particularly with United Nations partners, United Nations country teams and non-governmental organizations. More work remains to be done in this important area if the initiatives and gains achieved through the work of this mandate are to become an embedded component of the United Nations system's policies and programmes for children affected by armed conflict.